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DE RUEHWL #0124/01 0301130

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FM AMEMBASSY WARSAW

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 5851

INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE

RUEHKW/AMCONSUL KRAKOW 1976

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 WARSAW 000124

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/29/2023

TAGS: PGOV PREL MARR PL

SUBJECT: COHABITATION TENSIONS CONTINUE AS PRESIDENT SEEKS
(WITHOUT SUCCESS) TO ASSERT ROLE

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Classified By: Political Counselor Mary T. Curtin for reasons
1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: President Lech Kaczynski's often-clumsy efforts to assert the power and role of the presidency have created a bumpy record at "cohabitation" with PM Donald Tusk's government, and done nothing to increase the president's influence or his party's popularity. President Kaczynski and his advisors have attempted a number of unsuccessful maneuvers to assert leadership in foreign and domestic policy (especially with regard to special services) and to politically weaken Tusk and Civic Platform (PO), ranging from priority issues for the U.S., such as Iraq, Missile Defense, and relations with Moscow, to domestic problems such as the health care crisis. Tusk and his government have generally come out on top, revealing errors in President Kaczynski's (or his advisors') reading of the constitution and often simply catching them in inaccuracies. The Kaczynskis' almost reflexive combative style, which lost them the 2007 elections, shows through, meaning the Tusk government comes out looking good in most of the encounters. There is cooperation on some important issues--such as attendance at the NATO summit or unity in support for Georgian President Saakashvili--but we fully expect President Kaczynski to continue to seek to muscle in on foreign policy priorities. The effectiveness of spinning stories for their political advantage is limited, and Tusk has gained popularity by taking the moral high ground. End Summary.

FM Sikorski Summoned Home for Urgent Meeting

¶2. (U) With meetings planned for Brussels, Kyiv and Washington within five days, Poland's peripatetic Foreign Minister, Radek Sikorski, was forced to leave Brussels half-way through an EU foreign minister's meeting on January 28 when he was summoned back to Warsaw for an "immediate and urgent" meeting with President Lech Kaczynski. Before leaving Brussels, Sikorski told the press that he expected the meeting to be focused on Ukraine, where Sikorski would travel on January 30. After a 90-minute meeting with Kaczynski and Anna Fotyga, his predecessor as FM and now the President's Chief of Staff and senior advisor on foreign policy, Sikorski refused any comment. However, the Presidential Chancellery later said that Ukraine was only discussed briefly. The FM spokesman responded with a barbed comment that there had been "no good reason" to bring Sikorski back early. On January 29, in his usual understated manner, Deputy PM and Minister of Interior Grzegorz Schetyna signalled the government's irritation, underscoring that if the meeting with the President could have been delayed, it should have, and suggested that "relations between (the

chancelleries) should be built in a responsible way." Fotyga defended the President saying it was "entirely the FM's choice to leave Brussels early," prompting Sikorski to respond that he had the impression that President Kaczynski "was again misled by his employees."

¶3. (C) President Kaczynski's actions speak to the fitful quality of his cohabitation with PM Donald Tusk, who trounced Kaczynski's identical twin, Law and Justice (PiS) party head and former Prime Minister Jarek Kaczynski, in October 2007 parliamentary elections. The President tried to stop the appointment of Sikorski as Foreign Minister, mostly out of lingering anger over Sikorski's open disdain for the Kaczynskis after his resignation as Minister of Defense in the Kaczynski government. President Kaczynski and his advisors have complained vigorously about Tusk's approach on foreign policy, disagreeing pointedly on the withdrawal of Polish troops from Iraq, and criticizing the government's efforts to ease relations with Russia and its approach to MD negotiations, and battling over ambassadorial assignments. With the Kaczynskis trying to assert their ideological goal of creating a strong presidency, it is certain that the Presidential chancellery will continue to jockey with the government for influence or preeminence on foreign policy and security matters, despite most experts' assessment that in most cases, the constitution gives the government the lead.

Missile Defense and Iraq: All Politics are Local

¶4. (C) One subject for dispute has been negotiations over the proposed placement of interceptor sites in Poland as part of the U.S. missile defense program. Kaczynski is a strong proponent of the sites, whereas PM Tusk is publicly more ambivalent. Tusk's position more accurately reflects Polish popular skepticism over MD, arguing that he needs a better security deal for Poland to sell MD domestically. Kaczynski

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has already used surrogates to sound out the idea that Tusk is caving into pressure from Moscow's opposition to the extension of MD to Poland. Indeed, Fotyga has publicly criticized the government's approach as soft on Russia. If MD negotiations falter, Kaczynski will surely exploit the issue for political gain domestically, painting Tusk as weak on security. Similarly, President Kaczynski opposed withdrawing troops from Iraq and at first suggested he would veto the government's December 2007 proposal to extend troops in Iraq until October 31, 2008, saying he wanted a later end date. He backed down, however, when the government pointed out that a veto would mean the troops would have had to come home at the end of 2007. Constitutionally, he has no role in MD negotiations, and can veto the deployment of troops, but not order them.

¶5. (U) Tensions between the chancelleries extend equally into domestic issues, including wrangling over appointments of chiefs of the special services and exchanging insults over the worrisome state of the Polish public health sector. The Kaczynskis remain obsessed with control of the services and the President tried to block Tusk's new appointments to intelligence agencies by exploiting vague wording requiring the PM to seek the President's opinion (but not approval of) new appointees. When the President tried to stop the process by simply failing to respond, Tusk called his bluff and appointed new service chiefs without the Presidential opinion. On health care, Tusk complains openly that the Kaczynskis left this problem to fester, and that the President's efforts to convene a "White Summit" on January 14 to address the issue were little more than a political ploy. Afterwards, Tusk criticized Kaczynski as ill prepared, saying that Kaczynski "did not want to help," but "wanted to present his position instead." Tusk added that the President "asked three questions but was so impatient that he did not want to listen to the answers." The debate over how to rescue

Poland's crumbling national health service has now returned to the purview of the government and the Sejm.

Exploiting Issues for Political Gain

¶6. (C) Even national tragedies have come into political play. President Kaczynski lashed out at the Tusk government, and Minister of Defense Bogdan Klich in particular, claiming Klich failed to alert him in a timely fashion to the January 23 airplane crash which claimed the lives of 19 Polish officers in western Poland. Afterwards, it became clear that the government had sought to contact counterparts at the Polish National Security Agency (BBN), but no one was on hand after working hours, and moreover that Presidential advisor Michal Kaminski was informed of the accident, but failed to tell the President. The Presidential chancellery lamely argued, subsequently, that it was MOD Klich's responsibility to contact the President personally. The Presidency was widely criticized for what appeared to be simply an effort to attack Klich. The Kaczynski penchant for stoking a crisis first and dealing with the facts later was also evident when the President complained that Warsaw's Mayor, Hanna Gronkiewicz-Walz, failed to notify him of roadwork to be done on the street in front of his office. That, too, was walked back when the Mayor provided the press information as to the President's prior notification. The Tusk government approach, is to put out the facts, then sadly regret that the President has been misled by his advisors, an approach that seems to work with public opinion.

¶7. (C) Comment: Given the highly polarized nature of domestic Polish politics, we are not surprised that tension continues between PM Tusk's government and President Kaczynski. This will continue. On some critical issues, such as the NATO summit and broad policy toward Ukraine and Georgia, for example, they seem to be able to reach agreement, but many see the hand of Jarek Kaczynski in the constant and often ill-planned dust-ups. The more interesting point is that Kaczynski's efforts to exploit domestic and international issues for political gain has fallen largely flat, with PM Tusk credited for taking the moral high road. With the Polish Constitution purposefully vague on the separation of powers, but generally clear on the leading role of the government, we anticipate that a spirited contest for influence will continue to play itself out, with undoubtedly greater intensity as 2010 Presidential elections draw closer.

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